# FIRST PILLAR

*Thirty Verses on the Soteriological Exclusivity of Islam*

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# INTRODUCTION

*What This is About*

The question we will address in this paper revolves around belief in the Prophet ﷺ and the question of universality of religions. Are all religions vehicles of salvation? This is known soteriology, the study of who is saved. There is some very high quality literature produced by Muslims holding that only belief in God, not Muhammad, is required for salvation, a direct undermining of the first pillar of Islam, which requires explicit belief in Allah *and* in the Messenger Muhammad ﷺ. When I spoke privately to a senior scholar in America, he advised that we produce an appendix, a paper that can be disseminated widely and serve as a resource and an inoculation against this idea for those who come upon such works. Our goal here is not to name and deconstruct these works, for they are too many (usually found in esoteric and interfaith circles). What we will do is show plainly that Allah will not accept the rejection of the Prophet ﷺ by any means, and that there is no higher order spirituality that would validate not following the Messenger ﷺ. Further, we will show that the rejection of this pillar of faith is not 'an opinion' but a heterodoxy of the highest order. We will also show how and why those interpretations are both incorrect and potentially disasterous 'on the ground' (i.e. if spread and applied at the community level).

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# PART ONE

*On Sources • What Makes an Interpretation Valid • Heresy & It's Consequences*

**Extra-Textual Sources**

It is known by necessity that in Islam the only source of absolute truth lies in the Quran and in the authenticated teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. Yet from time to time one comes across the suggestion that there are other sources above the Book and the Sunna. Among political/legal secularists, there are those who argue against the Sharīᶜa on the basis that 'times have changed,' and so in this sense they have placed 'time' above revelation. Many (if not all) philosophers place human reason above revelation. It is common to find naturalists (scientists) placing their explanation of natural occurrences above revelation. At the common level, culture and 'what everyone is doing these days,' is the culprit. Lastly, on rare occasion one will come across esotericists or aspiring mystics who claim to have a vantage point above all religions that allows them to 'see' that all forms of mysticisms, regardless of religion, are valid paths to God. These individuals have placed the testimony of their mystical leaders above the revelation. In all cases, to place any source of truth above the revelation is akin to worshipping another god. We shall explain.

ᶜAdī b. Ḥātim was a great Arab leaders that became a Christian. When the Prophet ﷺ emerged, he fled north towards Syria. In time, his sister was captured and the Prophet ﷺ freed her on account of the goodness of her father, the generous host and care-taker of travelers, Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī. She accepted Islam and went up to Syria to meet her brother, whom she advised to go Madina and meet the Prophet ﷺ. He agreed and word spread that the noble ᶜAdī was coming. He finally arrived and entered in on the Messenger ﷺ wearing a large silver cross. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Take off that idol (*wathan*)." Then he recited to him from Sūrat al-Tawba until the verse, "They took their priests and rabbis as lords besides Allah" (9:31 Tawba). ᶜAdī (who would become one of the great questioners and learners) interjected and said, "We never used to worship them." The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Did they make *ḥalāl* into *ḥaram* and *ḥarām* into *ḥalāl* and the people would follow them?" He replied, "Yes." The Prophet ﷺ said, "That is their worship of them" (Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Ṭabarī). So we now see that taking a source of knowledge above the revelation is akin to "taking a lord besides Allah," which is the greatest of all sins and the only unforgivable sin on the Day of Judgment (if one were to die without repenting from it). "Verily Allah does not forgive *shirk* but forgives anything less than that for whomever He wishes" (4:48 Nisāʾ). This

verse overrides all of the all-encompassing verses of Allah's forgiveness based on the known rule that what is specific (*khāṣṣ*) overrides and qualifies what is general (*ʿām*).

This hadith also gives us the guidelines and acceptability of a Muslim looking into other sources. Firstly, it is permissible for a Muslim to read anything and take wisdom from it. "Wisdom is the lost beast of the believer; wherever he finds it, he has more right to it" (Ibn Abī Shayba, Tirmidhī, Ibn Māja). But where a believer must stop is when that source contradicts revelation, because what the Prophet ﷺ criticized was their following in making *ḥalāl* into *ḥarām* and vice-versa. And this is in matters of law, let alone matters of creed which is far heavier and weightier. If and when any outside source contradicts the revelation, the source is wrong and the revelation is right.

In most cases, those who are engaged in an extra-textual source will not out rightly say that the revelation is wrong. Rather, they will look for a text (a verse or a hadith) that supports what they want to uphold. And in many cases, they will find one. But the question is, does that conclusion pass by *all* the other relelvatn verses on the topic. Does it pass the test of the hadith, and the actions of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions ﷺ. The interpretation of an evidence becomes null and void if it contradicts another piece of evidence. We shall now expand on this so that we can become educated in what renders an interpretation valid. The criterion is simple, objective, and factual; not secret, complicated, or determined by majority rules.

**The Difference Between A Valid Opinion, An Invalid Opinion, & A Heresy (*Zandaqa*)**

A valid opinion in Islam is an explanation of a piece of evidence (a verse or hadith) that adheres to the language of the text and does not contradict another piece of evidence. A simple example regards the *ʿidda*, or waiting period, of a woman after divorce. "Three *qurū'*" can be understood as three menstrual cycles (therefore two months) or three periods of purity (therefore three months). Both match the language and neither contradicts any other piece of evidence, so here we have a valid difference of opinion. All (or most) of the differences in *fiqh* between the four *madhhabs* are of this nature.

An invalid opinion is an explanation of a piece of evidence that contradicts either the language or another piece of evidence. Let's take another example: the claim that Isḥāq was the son Prophet Ibrāhīm had to slaughter. This opinion exists among the Salaf and even amongst some Companions. But ultimately, it contradicts two pieces of evidence. 1) Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt verses 102-112, in which Allah speaks about giving Ibrāhīm his first son. The verse does not name him. The passage then speaks of the command to slaughter him and how it was lifted after he (Prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ) proved himself to Allah. Then in verse 112 Allah says, "We gave him glad tidings of Isḥāq." And so Isḥāq gets introduced to the picture *after* the slaughter incident took place. So how could he have been commanded to slaughter one who had not yet existed. 2) The hadith of "I am the son of the two slaughtered ones (intended for slaughter)" (*Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*),

and we are in agreement that the Prophet's father was at one point intended for slaughter, therefore the other *dhabīḥ* must be Ismāᶜīl (since the Prophet ﷺ is not related to Isḥāq). Thus, the opinion that it is Isḥāq is incorrect no matter who narrates it because it has been overridden by multiple primary source texts.

We now ask, what differentiates a merely incorrect opinion from a heterodoxy or a heresy (*zandaqa*)? A heresy touches upon a core matter of belief (*ᶜaqīda*) connected to a Divine command (*amr*) and threat of punishment (*waᶜīd*). Namely, The Ḥaqq has commanded us to believe it and threatened a punishment if we refuse to believe it. To insist that Isḥāq was the *dhabīḥ* is incorrect but ultimately not contravening a Divine commandment. There is no threat (*waᶜīd*) connected to the matter at all. Therefore, it is a mistake that has no consequence in this life or the next. Now when an *amr* (command) and a *waᶜīd* (threat) are connected to a matter, then any interpretation or opinion that contravenes that command and threat becomes elevated to the level of heresy. If one is mistaken or simply ignorant, then it is forgivable. However, once the proofs have been presented to one, then they are culpable, especially if the matter is known in religion by necessity (*maᶜlūm min al-dīn bil ḍarūra*). "You are not held accountable for mistakes, but only that which your hearts insist upon" (33:5 Aḥzāb).

**What is the Consequence of Heresy (*Zandaqa*)?**

What do we say about a Muslim who does great deeds, has great character, and 'is a good person,' but stubbornly refuses to believe in one of the verses of the Quran, despite the evidence being presented to them? (Note that we said 'believe' not act, for "every human being does wrong actions," and wrongs in beliefs are weightier than wrongs of action.) There are two evidences that answer this. For such a one, Allah has revealed, "Do you believe in part of the Book and reject part? Any of you who do this will have nothing but humiliation in this life and on the Day of Judgment will continuously be punished with a painful torment" (2:58 Baqara). One may retort that this verse came down for the Jews of Madina. The known reply to this is that every warning issued to the Jews, Christians, or Pagans is first and foremost a warning to the Muslims, for how can it be that Allah would scold the Jews for 'picking and choosing' then allow Muslims to do it? The second response would be the principle: the reason behind a revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) does not constrict the meaning of the text (*maᶜna al-naṣṣ*).

The second evidence comes from the famous hadith of Ibn ᶜUmar regarding the first heretics in Islam: the Qadarites, who rejected predestination (*qadar*). After the death of the Prophet ﷺ, two Baṣrans named Yaḥya b. Yaᶜmar and Ḥumayd al-Ḥimyarī grew concerned over Maᶜbad al-Juhanī, an erudite scholar who practiced Islam and did good deeds, but had one problem: he preached that there was no *qadar*, that you and only you dictate reality (*al-amra unuf*). So they went to the Ḥijāz for Ḥajj and approached Ibn ᶜUmar on the matter. "Ibn ᶜUmar, there has emerged a group of people who recite/study the Quran and go extremely deep in knowledge, but they say there is no *qadar*." Ibn ᶜUmar replied, "Tell them that if they

donated a mountain of gold it would not be accepted from them and that Ibn ᶜUmar has nothing to do with them (*barīʾun minhum*) and that they have nothing to do with me until they return to believe in *qadar*." In sum, even if a person does many many good deeds and 'is a good person,' their rejection of a fundamental of faith renders all their good deeds invalid. As for one's interaction with them, one should keep a distance and not fraternize with them (*al-barāʾa*).

Now what if someone was to say that this is *qawl ṣaḥābī*, the statement of a Companion and therefore not required law for us? We would correct such an individual's notion of *qawl ṣaḥābī* and remind them that this phrase applies to *fiqh* (law) and matters of human judgement, but not to unseen matters (*ghaybiyyāt*), for a Companion would never speak of unseen matters, in this case the acceptability of one's deeds, except that he learned it from the Prophet ﷺ himself. Furthermore, we would tell him that the two rulings Ibn ᶜUmar gave were nothing more than the application of the verse: "They have in this life humiliation" (and so how can their deeds be pleasing and accepted by Allah while He has ordained upon them humiliation). As for his pronouncement of *barāʾa* (staying away, not fraternizing), this too is nothing more than action upon the Quran: "If you see anyone speaking out of line regarding our verses (*yakhūḍūna fī āyātinā*) then stay away from them (*fa aᶜriḍ ᶜanhum*) until they speak about something else. And if Shayṭān makes you forget (to move away from them), then do not sit, after hearing this reminder, with the doers of wrong" (6:68 al-Anᶜām). In sum, the consequences of heresy are grave indeed: one's good deeds will not count anymore, and the Muslims should keep away from them. But if they were to correct their positions, then both of these would be reversed. We ask Allah *ᶜāfiyya* and *salāma* from falling into this.

Lastly, what does the Sacred Law say about the heretic? Denying that which is known by necessity and clear in the Quran is a capital offense. Therefore, the Sharīᶜa has more tolerance for People of the Book (they have the right of residency, marriage to Muslim men, and their slaughtered meats are lawful) and atheists and pagans (they have the right to visit Dār al-Islam when it existed and conduct business). Simply being a Christian, Jew, atheist, or pagan is not a crime in Islam. But to be a Muslim promoting heretical views is. It is as if to say, you can choose to embark on the train of Islam or not. But if you do, submit to it as is it; don't touch the steering wheel.

**Why Heresy Should Not/Cannot Be Sited As 'Difference of Opinion'**

Opinions are glorified by the Quran: "Those who strive in Us, We will guide them to our paths (*subulana*)" (29:69 ᶜAnkabūt). A valid reading of this is that those who strive to draw near to Allah will come to learn that there are different options and paths, *madhhabs* and *maslaks* that flow parallel to the Book and the Sunna and do not contradict them, and all will lead to Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ in the end. Now once an opinion is deemed a heresy (namely, it goes against other verses and hadiths), then admitting it into the realm of valid opinions is nothing less than folly and meaninglessness (*ᶜabath*). Even

speaking of a heresy in public (as a preacher or in a *khuṭba*) has been discussed as a potential sin for causing *fitna* or confusion (see Ibn Jawzī's *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wal Mudhakkirīn*).

There are only two places one may write about heresy. The first is in the process of refuting it and the second is in the genre of history. The historian is not taken as a theologian or spiritual guide. The reader does not pick up a book of history to learn about God. Therefore, a historian may cite and outline the beliefs of a particular individual or movement. We see this in *The Muqaddima* (*Introduction*) of Ibn Khaldūn, in the *Bidāya wal-Nihāya* (*Beginning and End*) of Ibn Kathīr, and in many other works (but as practicing Muslims, they interjected phrases indicative of their belief). Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* combines the two genres in a sense, since he gives the reader all the narrations of a particular verse, but he does not leave it at that. He informs the reader of what is weak, what is contradictory, and what is unsound or heretical. In the end, he also gives his opinion of what is most correct. Therefore, when someone cites a strange story or interpretation then cites Ṭabarī, one should not assume that to be endorsed by Ṭabarī's unless he specifies it. (Likewise, the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad is a collection of "all that is used by scholars of repute." He does not apply all the hadiths in his *Musnad* into his *fiqh* because he may feel there is stronger evidence.)

# PART TWO

*On the Invalidity of 'Inclusive & Universal' Interpretations of Salvation*

**The Use and Misuse of 2:62**

Be it inspired by mysticism, esotericism, interfaith, sympathy for one's parents, or simply one's own desires, whoever wants to render Jews, Christians and others saved despite rejecting the Prophet ﷺ needs some Quranic evidence to validate this view to the Muslim community. Towards this end, verse 2:62 (Baqara) is used alongside with the two verses like it of 5:69 and 22:17. The Baqara verse reads:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا

فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

"Verily those who believe, and the Jews, Christians, and Sabians who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteous works have their reward with Allah. No one should have fear for them nor be in grief" (2:62 Baqara).

('Sabian' is an Arabic term for one who left his people's religion (*ṣabaʾa*), and applies to people born into pagan cultures who never received a prophet or message but rejected paganism and believed in one god instinctively.) The inclusive interpretation is that a good Christians and good Jew go to Paradise for being good in their own religions. This interpretation is invalid because it contradicts thirty verses. (Note that we have not even opened the door of hadith; this matter is so clear in the Quran that no recourse to hadith is needed. But we will still cite some at the end because the hadith reflects the action and understanding of the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions.) Before showing these verses, we will briefly explain that this verse was revealed for Salmān al-Fārisī when he asked about those pious Christians and Jews he met *before* the advent of the Messenger ﷺ:

> One time Salmān was talking to the Prophet ﷺ and began speaking of his past, of how the scholars and hermits he met "used to fast and pray and believe that you will be sent as a prophet." After this, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Salmān, they are from the people of the fire." Then Salmān became very down about the matter and so Allah revealed this verse. The faith of the Jews was to follow the law of Mūsā ﷺ until ᶜĪsā ﷺ came. When ᶜĪsā came, he confirmed the law of Mūsā and removed some things from it, so whoever kept the law of Mūsā but rejected ᶜĪsā was

destroyed. Then those who followed ᶜĪsā were the believers until the advent of Muhammad ﷺ. If they rejected Muhammad, then they are destroyed" (Ibn Kathīr).

In sum, the Jews and Christians in this verse are those of the past, the Jews up to Jesus and the Christians up to Muhammad. We can now turn to the numerous verses that render the inclusive interpretation invalid.

**The 'Not-Saved' References to Jews and Christians**

2:62 is not the only reference to the People of the Book in the Quran. Thus, in order to test the conclusion that they are saved even if they have heard of and rejected the Prophet ﷺ, then we must pass it through *all* of the verses that mention the People of the Book. I have put the translations in a lighter color and darkened the commentary. The commentary is not a *tafsir* but rather points out how this verse is relevant to the negation of the inclusive interpretation of 2:62.

**1** غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

"Other than the earners of wrath and the astray" (1:7 Fātiḥa). In his conversation with ᶜAdī b. Ḥātim, the Prophet ﷺ says, "The *maghḍūb ᶜalayhim* are the Jews and the *ḍāllīn* are the Christians" (Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd).

**2** وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ

"They were struck by the wrath (*ghaḍab*) of God. That is because of their rejection of Divine signs and the killing of prophets" (2:61 Baqara). And are not all prophets 'Divine signs'? Therefore, their being *maghḍūb ᶜalayhim* is directly linked to their rejection of prophets. Similar wording and meaning is found in 3:112 Āl ᶜImrān.

**3** وَلَنْ تَرْضَى عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَى حَتَّى تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَى وَلَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

"The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you until you follow their ways. If they are guided and saved as per the 2:62 inclusive interpretation, then what would be wrong in following 'their ways.' Say, the guidance of Allah is the only guidance. Therefore 'their ways,' Judaism and Christianity, is no longer characterized as 'Allah's guidance.' If you follow their whims after what has come to you of knowledge, then you will not find in Allah a protector or victor" (2:120 Baqara). Thus, 'their ways' are

‘whims’ not ‘knowledge.’ And if following their whims results in the loss of Divine protection and victory, then it logically will only result in harm and failure.

4 يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ

“People of the Book, why do you reject/make *kufr* of the signs of Allah, while you are witnesses to it” (3:70 Āl ʿImrān). How can they be saved and be rejecters at the same time.

5 وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

“Some from the People of the Book believe in Allah and what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down to them with humble piety towards Allah, not trading the signs of God for a cheap price. These are the ones who have their reward with their Lord. Allah is swift in judgement” (3:199 Āl ʿImrān). Could this also be the ‘reward’ alluded to in 2:62? Possibly. Either way, when does the Jew and the Christian get that reward? When he completes his faith by believing in what has been sent to the Prophet ﷺ, which is the Quran, which is Islam.

6 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ أُولَئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

This is by far the most damning of all refuting verses of the 2:62 inclusivity reading. “Verily those who disbelieved in Allah and His Messengers and desire to separated between Allah and His Messengers and say, we believe in some and reject some, and wish to take this as a path; they are the truly the disbelievers, and We have prepared for this disbelievers a humiliating punishment. And those who believer in Allah and His Messenger, and do not separate between any of them, these are the ones who will receive their reward. Allah is forgiving and merciful” (4:150-1). No comment needed.

7 وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ قُلْ فَلِمَ يُعَذِّبُكُمْ بِذُنُوبِكُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ مِمَّنْ خَلَقَ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

"The Jews and the Christians said, 'We are the children of Allah and His beloveds.' Say, 'Then why is He punishing you with your sins. You are just people that He created. He forgives whom He wishes and punishes whom He wishes" (5:18 Māʾida).

8 قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا أَهْوَاءَ قَوْمٍ قَدْ ضَلُّوا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَضَلُّوا عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ

"Say, People of the Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion and do not follow the whims of people who came before you. They went astray (*ḍallū*) before, they led others astray, and they went off the right path" (5:77 Māʾida). How can they be saved and astray simultaneously?

9 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"Oh you who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as protectors. They are allies of each other. Whoever takes them as protectors is one of them. Verily Allah does not guide the transgressors" (5:51). Set aside that the subject of taking Jews and Christians as friends and allies (because there are more verses and hadiths to be examined before drawing a blanket conclusion); our point with this verse is that if good practicing Jews and Christians were saved as per the inclusive interpretation of 2:62, then what would be wrong with being "one of them" (*minhum*)?

10 وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ غُلَّتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ يُنْفِقُ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا وَأَلْقَيْنَا بَيْنَهُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ كُلَّمَا أَوْقَدُوا نَارًا لِلْحَرْبِ أَطْفَأَهَا اللَّهُ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

"The Jews said, 'God is tight-fisted.' Nay, it is they who are tight-fisted. And they are cursed for what they said. Rather His hands are wide open; He gives however He wishes. *What has been revealed to you from your Lord will only increase them in transgression and disbelief.* We have placed between them

enmity and hatred until the Day of Judgment. Every time they kindle the fire of war, Allah puts it out. They strive to spread corruption in the land and Allah loves not the corrupt" (5:64 Māʾida). Note what is italicized.

**11** قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَى شَيْءٍ حَتَّى تُقِيمُوا التَّوْرَاةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

"Oh People of the Book you are on nothing until you establish the Torah and the Bible and what has been brought down to you from your Lord. What has been brought down to you from your Lord will only increase most of them in transgression and disbelief. So do not grieve over the disbelieving people" (5:68 Māʾida). Three sources are mentioned here: the Torah, the Bible, and 'what has been brought down to you.' What is this last source that the People of the Book must practice? Let us look at other mentions of the phrase 'what has been brought down to you.' We find it right away in His address to the Messenger ﷺ. Therefore, 'what has been brought down to you' is the Quran. If someone retorts that the verses says 'brought down to you (Jews and Christians),' but the Quran was not revealed to them, so how can it be the Quran? We reply and say that the word is 'brought down' (*unzila*) not 'revealed' (*ūḥiya*), and by 'to you,' it means it is addressing you, commanding, forbidding, and teaching. Therefore, until they accept and act upon the Quran, they are 'upon nothing.' So how can they be saved if they are 'upon nothing'? Further, their will *increase* in disbelief (*kufr*) every time they hear 'what has been sent to you.' Therefore, they must already by on disbelief, for how can someone increase in something he does not already have? Lastly, they are called 'disbelieving people.'

**12** لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِّيسِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

"You will find that the most hateful towards the believers are the Jews and those who are pagans. And you will find that those nearest to the believers in affection are those who said 'We are the supporters of Christ.' That is because amongst them are scholarly priests and monks and because they do not have arrogance" (5:82 Māʾida). The point here is not their blame or praise, but that they are contrasted with the believers. There are four groups in this verse: believers, pagans, Jews, and Christians. Therefore, the Jews and Christians are *not* classified as believers (due to their incomplete belief in Heavenly Books and Prophets).

13 يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

In a passage about Christians that starts from 9:29, The Ḥaqq closes: "They wish to blot out the light of Allah with their mouths (words), and Allah insists to bring forth His light, even if the disbelievers hate it" (9:32 Tawba). If they are guided as the inclusive interpretation of 2:62 would have it, then they should be *upon* God's light, not trying to blot it out. Also, they are characterized as disbelievers. Similar wording and meaning is found in 61:8 (Ṣaff).

14 وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُوَ يُدْعَى إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"Recall when ᶜĪsā b. Maryam said, 'Oh Sons of Israel, I am a messenger of Allah sent unto you, confirming what is in my hands of the Torah and giving you glad tidings of a messenger to come after me named Aḥmad.' When he (Aḥmad) finally came to them with proofs, they said this is clearly just sorcery. Who can be more oppressive than someone who invents lies about God after being invited to submission/Islam. Allah does not guide oppressors" (61:6-7 Ṣaff). Their rejection of 'Aḥmad' renders them 'oppressors.'

15 وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

"Do not debate the People of the Book except in a good way" (29:46 ᶜAnkabūt). Why debate them at all if they are saved as per the 2:62 inclusive interpretation.

16 لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

"Those who disbelieved from the People of the Book and the pagans were not going to change until they received a clear message" (98:1 Bayyina). Firstly, they are called 'those who disbelieved.' Secondly, why would they need to change if they were saved as per the inclusive interpretation of 2:62. Thirdly, the phrase 'those who disbelieved from the People of the Book' does not just appear once. It appears five times (2:105, 59:2, 59:11, 98:1, 98:6).

If we were to stop here, it would suffice. The argument is already over, with the incorrect inclusive interpretation of 2:62 already obliterated and shattered to pieces. Yet for the sake of thoroughness and the

blessing of reading Quranic verses, we will supply some verses for the next two sections, verses that require belief in the Prophet ﷺ and verses that require following Islam itself. If it is any one of these three, then it upends the inclusive interpretation of 2:62.

**Verses Requiring Belief in the Prophet ﷺ**

**17** فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيم

"If they believe in what you believe in, only then will they be rightly guided. And if they turn their backs on it, then they will be in continuous disputation. Allah will protect you from them; He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing" (2:137 Baqara). No comment needed.

**18** وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَى ذَلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

"And recall when Allah took an oath from the prophets. 'I have given you scriptures and wisdom. Now if a messenger comes to you confirming what is with you, you must believe in him and give him victory. Do you agree to this and swear to it as binding on you?' They said,' We do.' He said, 'Then be witnesses to it and I too am with you amongst the witnesses'" (3:81 Āl ᶜImrān). It is this verse that is the basis of the Prophet's saying to ᶜUmar ﷺ, "If Mūsā was alive, he would have no option except to follow me" (Aḥmad, Ibn Abī Shayba, Ibn Ḥibbān). Ibn Ḥibbān's narration reads, "If Mūsā was alive and you left me to follow him, you would go astray." The mystic Ibn ᶜArabī, who is often used for universal religions arguments says about this, "It means they must know one another, believe in one another, support each in worshipping Allah and establishing His religion, and obey the Prophet ﷺ." If the past prophets have to follow the Messenger ﷺ, then by *mafhūm al-awlā*, their followers do too.

**19** وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

"We do not send messengers except for them to be obeyed by Allah's permission" (4:64 Nisāᵓ). This negates the sentiment some have that it suffices that one respect the Prophet ﷺ. Rather, they do not fully believe until they begin acting upon it.

20 فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّى يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

"Nay they do not truly believe until they make you the judge of their affair then find no qualms in your decision and submit perfectly" (4:65 Nisāʾ). This verse adds that true belief not only is reflected by acting upon the prophet's teachings; we must also make him the ultimate source of truth and judgement in disputation, namely his rank on the epistemic hierarchy.

21 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

"Oh you who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Book that has been brought down to the His Messenger and the Books that have been sent down before that. Whoever disbelieves in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment has gone far far astray" (4:136 Nisāʾ). This verse is a warning to those Muslims (since it addresses the *muminīn*) that have "believed in some of the Book and rejected parts." This faith is insufficient and will lead to punishment. One must accept all of the Book and all of the Sunna. What is else does 'believe in the Messenger' mean other than accepting everything in his Sunna to be perfect and exemplary. The second part of the verse is a clear statement that the Jews and Christians are astray if they reject heavenly books and messengers, even if they are upon past messengers and books.

22 يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَد جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَم

"Oh People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to you clarifying much of what you hide of the Scripture, and he overlooks much. A light from God has come to you, and a Book that makes things clear. Through it, Allah guides those who want his pleasure to peaceful paths and takes them out of the darkness and into the light by His permission. And He guides them to the straight path. Those who say God is the

Messiah son of Mary have certainly disbelieved" (5:15-16 Māʾida). Based on this, the People of the Book are in 'darkness' and only their submission to 'the light and the Book' can they be moved into 'light.' If this is what is needed to be 'guided to the straight path,' then before this, they must have been on the crooked path. Lastly, how can Christians be saved as the 2:62 inclusive interpretation would have it, if Trinitarians are here deemed disbelievers?

**23** قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

"Say, 'Oh people, I am a Messenger of Allah to all of you…so believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered prophet, who believes in Allah and His Words. Follow him so that you can be successful (7:158 Aʿrāf). This is a response to the fallacious thesis that the Prophet ﷺ only came to the Arabs. This verse addresses "people" not "my tribe" or "my people." It confirms this meaning with the word "*jamīʿan,*" 'all of you.'

**24** إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِه

"Verily the believers are those who believe in Allah and His Messengers" (24:62 Nūr). The Jews were nicknamed Yahūd which means repentance, because every time they went away from faith they would repent and come back. Quran says, "They said we return (*hudnā*) unto You" (7:156 Aʿrāf). Prophet ʿĪsā called his followers the Supporters when he asked "Who are my supporters (*anṣār*) for Allah" (61:14 Ṣaff). In the same vein, the followers of Muhammad were given the moniker Believers (*muʾminūn*), because of the strength of their submission and because they have completed belief in all heavenly books, messengers, and prophets. Here, Allah defines the Believers as "those who believe in Allah and His Messenger."

**25** وَمَنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَإِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَعِيرًا

"Whoever does not believe in Allah and His Messenger, verily We have prepared for the disbelievers a blazing Fire" (48:13 Fatḥ). This is an example of the *waʿīd*, the threat of punishment, which we spoke of above. Therefore any suggestion that Prophet ﷺ does not need to be believed in, followed, or obeyed, is not only uttering an incorrect opinion; it is heresy also known as *zandaqa* or *kufr*, the consequence of which are outlined above; their good deeds are unacceptable to Allah until they correct their beliefs, the believers should not fraternize with them, and it is punishable by death. These are the consequences of heresy.

26 وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ يُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ يُعَذِّبْهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

"Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, Allah will enter him into gardens under which rivers flow. And whoever turns away will be punished with a painful torment" (48:17 Fatḥ).

27 إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

"Verily the believers are those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and do not have any doubt it this. They strive for the sake of God in with their wealth and their selves (49:15 Ḥujurāt). Another definition of the name 'Believer' which is allotted to the followers of the Prophet ﷺ and the correct believers in truth.

28 كُلٌّ كَذَّبَ الرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ وَعِيد

"All those who reject prophets earn punishment" (50:14 Qāf). This is another example of *waʿīd* associated with a command. Not all commands are associated with threats. For example, "Be with the honest" (*kūnū maʿ al-ṣādiqīn*) is not associated with a threat and so if someone for some reason prefers to stay alone and not join the pious believers, he may be upon something incorrect (*ʿalā khaṭaʾ*, *zāʾīgh*), but not a heretic for that matter is not a core fundamental of faith.

**Verses Lauding Islam as the Only Valid Religion**

29 إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَاب

"The den in Allah's sight is Islam. The People of the Book only differed violently among themselves after knowledge came to them. Whoever rejects the signs of Allah, verily Allah is speedy in judgement" (3;19 Āl ʿImrān). This is the first of four verses in which the word *'islām*' is used,[1] and I am disputing that its translation as 'submission,' is both correct and incorrect. It is only a partial truth. The meaning of 'submission' by itself, according the lexicon is *al-istislām*, not *al-islām*. Now if when we look at the word *islām* or *al-islām*, we find a specific meaning of submission inside of the formal religion of Islam as given to the Prophet ﷺ.

[1] 3:19, 3:85, 5:3, 61:7.

We are looking at Lane's Lexicon[2] and we are examining specifically the *maṣdar* form,[3] not the verb form. Under *sīn-lām-mīm*, *islām* and *al-islam* are defined as "the religion of Islam as a principle of the law of God is the manifesting of humility or submission and outward conforming with the law of God and taking upon oneself to do or to say as the Prophet has done or said…*Al-islām* is with the tongue, *al-īmān* is with the heart…Every prophet has been sent with *al-islām*, but the ordinances differ."[4] Therefore, the word *islām* refers simultaneously to submission and the religion we know as Islam with a capital 'I." There are many meanings to the root *sīn-lām-mīm*, but they all come in various verb forms and not as the gerund '*islām*.' When we look for 'submission' we find *al-istaslam*[5] not *islam*. As a verb, *aslama* can mean submitting, but not as a gerund. In sum, the translation of *islām* as 'submission' should be translated either as 'Islam' alone or as 'submission in Islam' or as 'the correct submission to God,' but never merely submission alone.

Now let us pitch a hypothetical. Let us say that the lexicon gave us both 'submission' and 'Islam' as possible meanings of *islām*. If that were the case, would not context cause us to lean to one meaning or the other when we are translating? In this case, consider the context of the Sūrat Āl ᶜImrān. Is it about rebellion, such that submission is the appropriate meaning, or is it about the quarrel over religions in Madina and the struggle to bring the Jews into Islam. The verse itself makes mention of the People of the Book and the word *islām* is characterized as a '*dīn*,' which is a faith or a religion or a way of life. Is submission a religion? Is it a way of life, such that its members never engage in conflict or war and constantly submit to their enemies? Clearly, the correct translation should either be 'Islam,' 'submission in Islam,' or 'correct submission to God,' which would entail accepting all of His prophets and all of His books. And Allah knows best.

**30** وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

"Whoever prefers other than *islām* as a *dīn*, it is not accepted from him and he is in the afterlife among the failures" (3:85 Āl ᶜImrān). See the discussion on *islām* in 3:19. Again, the context here is all about the various faiths and religions, not spiritual states. 'Submission' alone is a spiritual state not a religion. 'Submission' alone is *istislām* not *islām*. *'Islām'* should be translated as 'Islam,' 'submission in Islam,' or 'correct submission to Allah,' which entails belief in His most recent messenger, revelation, and law.

[2] This is the best Arabic lexicon rendered in English in my view. It draws from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* by al-Fayrūzabādī, the commentary on the *Qāmūs* entitled *Tāj al-ᶜArūs* by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, as well as Suyūṭī's *Muẓhir*

[3] The *maṣdar* is the gerund or verbal noun. For example 'I ran' and 'I am running' are the verb forms, while 'I took a run' and 'I love running' are the *maṣdar*/gerund/verbal noun forms.

[4] Lane, E. W. *Arabic English Lexicon.* Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984; vol. 1, pp. 1413, top of the middle column.

[5] Ibid.

**Hadiths Indicate the Same Meaning**

When it comes to hadith and *sīra*, we have not even scratched the surface. I have only added a few here to pad the matter and show how the Prophet ﷺ acted upon this.

**1** "There is no Jew or Christian who hears about me then rejects what I have brought except that he is from the people of Hell" (Aḥmad, Muslim).

**2** "All sons of Adam are born on the *fiṭra*, then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian" (Mālik, Bukhārī, Tirmidhī).

**3** "I was commanded to fight people until they testify that there is no god but Allah, that I am the Messenger of Allah, that they establish prayer and pay *zakāt*. If they do that they have protected themselves" (Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, Nasāʾī, and many others; when so many sources narrate a hadith, we can say *rawāhu al-jamāʿa*, in other words 'they all narrated it.').

**4** The Prophet's letter to the ruler of Egypt which was sent with Ḥāṭib b. Abī Baltaʿa and is still preserved until today reads: "I summon you to the call of Islam. Enter into Islam and you will have peace (*aslim taslam*), and Allah will give you two-fold reward. But if you decline then you will carry the sin of the Copts." Now if the universality of religions was a truthful reality, the Prophet ﷺ would have known it. And yet he writes to this Christian king and threatens him with the sin of all the Copts who fail to learn about the truth if he refuses to submit.

# CONCLUSION

*The Danger of Universal Creed • Balancing Theological Exclusivity with Prophetic Akhlaq*

We must return to the danger of universalism. Besides the fact that it contradicts as many proof-texts as it does, it can have a devastating effect if trickled down beyond the desks of university philosophers. So while inclusivity or universalism may have made conversion easier for some, we must also ask if this theology can *retain* future generations in Islam. How would it affect the unlearned? The youth? Teenagers who are attracted to the temptations of this world? If now a teen repeatedly comes upon a soft universalist message, that even those who don't believe in Muhammad can be saved, one can easily foresee him or her making a simple analogy: if those who don't believe in him can be saved by virtue of their spirituality, then those who are lax in observing his law are more worthy of being saved so long as they can maintain some spirituality. The language of universalism lacks certainty and firmness in insistance upon belief in the Prophet ﷺ, so how can it then be firm in insistance on following the Sacred Law?

The reality is that most believers aren't seeking higher levels of realization. They are torn between belief and temptation and it is only the fear of the fire that pulls them through these moments. If there are no threats or fear of the fire related to belief in the Prophet ﷺ, then all other threats should, by analogy, be downgraded too. One may argue that all of this is a far off speculation, but when we look back at historical precedent, toying with the fundamentals of faith always breeds unforeseen consequences. Furthermore, we see before our eyes how sound verses on *jihād* are misused and grossly misapplied. Why should one rule out that universalist ideas can also be misused and misapplied as well. Therefore, our goal is to be crystal clear in what our deen actually says and what it doesn't.

Members of liberal, pluralistic societies that preach tolerance as the highest of all ethics often times hesitate about anything exclusionary. The imagined consequence is that an exclusionary idea breeds intolerance that eventually leads to hate and violence and the downfall of society. This is an unnecessary (if not absurd) stretch of the imagination. No religion is more exclusive than Judaism. Not only do gentiles not go to heaven, the door to conversion is closed too, and yet liberal modern society does not expect them to open their theological doors to salvation.

What one must keep in mind is that Our Lord has not left us without guidance on matters of interaction, which are distinct from matters of belief. For example, Allah says, "The sky is about to crack and the earth is about to split open, and the mountains are about to collapse, from hearing that they say the

All-Merciful has a son" (19:89-90 Maryam). Imagine then by analogy how wicked pagan claims are. Now despite this, Allah tells us "Do not curse those they call upon besides Allah, lest they curse Allah out of enmity without knowledge" (6:108 Anᶜām). And he said, "And if they push you aggressively to worship a god besides Allah, then do not obey them, but be a good friend to them in worldly matters (31:15 Luqmān). Incidents in the *sīra* of the Prophet's kindness towards his pagan neighbors are countless and need not be mentioned here. They can be found in the books of *sīra* and *shamāʾil*.

Our deen honors the Torah and the Bible for their past link to the Divine Word, albeit that they are distorted today. When Ibn ᶜAbbās was traveling and did not have a place to pray, his first option was a temple from the People of the Book. Islam also prefers Judaism and Christianity over all other religions, as is evidenced of the Prophet ﷺ hoping that the Eastern Romans defeat the Persians, who were pagan. The Prophet ﷺ chose a just Christian country for his Companions to reside. We have mentioned as well that the Sharīᶜa allots more rights to the People of the Book than other religions. In sum, the People of the Book have a position in Islam, but this should not cause us to go astray and hold that their religion is still a path to salvation after all the evidence that has been relayed above.

وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد
وعلى آله وصحبه
وسلم
والحمد لله